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An Excerpt from:

Haircuts and History: State College's Classic Barbershop

By

Malcolm Pascotti

A young woman and her son walk through the doors of the barbershop, a small space below Urban Outfitters on College Avenue in State College, PA.

“This is his routine, he doesn’t want to get hair in his cookie” Donna, the shop’s owner, explained, cutting the hair of the young blond haired boy no more than five years old. The boy was holding his chocolate chip cookie outside of the long black cape draped over his body. The cape was twice as long as his entire body, flowing from his booster seat sitting on the chair’s arm rests down nearly to the barbershop floor.

“Do you remember your first haircut?” Donna asked the boy.

Not surprisingly, the boy shook his head indicating he did not.

Looking over towards the last chair in the shop, Donna asks another barber, “Do you remember how old he was?”

The other barber responds, “Oh, God, probably about five months, I think.”

This type of conversation continues for the rest of the haircut. Donna keeps asking the boy about everything from how his dog, which Donna remembers by name, to his favorite cartoons. After donna vacuums the top of his head and powders his neck, the boy crawls from his booster seat and off the chair then jumps up and yells, “I beat ya’ Pop!” At that moment, a tall grey-haired man gets up from the last chair in the shop and makes his way to the front register. Donna yells up the woman at the register, “Only \$10 for him. It takes me like five minutes to cut him, only \$10.”

The man, trying to give Donna a tip, insists. “Come on, Donna. When are gonna start agreeing to actually let me give you a tip?”

“Come on, I’m the owner, you know I don’t do that. Only the other girls take tips,” she replies.

“Ok, Ok” he replies, giving Donna’s would-be tip to one of the other barbers.

So the older man, his grandson, and daughter thank Donna and bid farewell to all the employees and head on their way.

“Ok, switch the TV off this kids crap, I can’t keep watching this all day” Donna says, directing one the barbers toward the remote.

The television channel was switched to children’s programming to accommodate the boy who was getting a cut from Donna.

One could only assume that this boy and his grandfather were family friends or neighbor, but, actually, they are not different from the walk-in customers that are comprised almost entirely of students. They were just simply long time customers that Donna has grown to know through interaction over the span of years. These are the relationships that the barbers at Fetterolf’s develop with customers. They aren’t forced or pre-established. They are organic and come about naturally through basic but continual interaction and general conversation

You would also assume the shop was without customers by the way Donna complained about the kiddy TV show, but that assumption would be false, as well. The waiting area was full, but Donna didn't care. The only reason she refrains from using the "f-bomb" she says, is because "the other gals [barbers] would shit themselves if I talked like that, they too quiet!" Welcome to Fetterolf's.

Aside from the modern digital cash register and credit card machine, there is very little that distinguishes Fetterolf's Barbershop of the present from the way it was in the 1970's. Ok, you can add the table with about twenty different current magazines to the list of modern things, but aside from that Fetterolf's is an old-time barber in all aspects. The classic elements of the barbershop are apparent before you even enter. The front windows are embellished with hand-painted letters and artwork that display the business' name and hours. Fetterolf's current owner, Donna Weaver, talks of the story of the painting of the front windows, as told to her by the original owner, the late George Fetterolf. George explained that a local "drunk" was also was also one of State College's most skilled painters. So, when it came time to create signage for the storefront, George approached the man and he agreed to design and paint the windows. Though the man's ability to paint the windows without any template or set design, all freehand, his intoxication level throughout the entire job is even more of a marvel. According to George, the painter drank an entire 750ml bottle of whiskey while he painted. Upon examining the windows, you would never know that they were painted free-hand by a man with a BAC that would send the average person on a trip to nearby Mt. Nittany Medical Center.

Opening the door to Fetterolf's is like stepping out of a time machine and into a world that no longer exists. Not only does it look like a barbershop of the past, but the relationships with customers and unbelievable level of customer service create an experience that rarely exists in our modern time with big box retailers and chain business that have squeezed out nearly all of their mom-and-pop's competitors.

Just inside that hand-painted door you are likely to see a crowd of men, mostly students in their early 20's, but some older locals, sitting in the eight chairs that line the wall to the left of the entrance. At the peak times, Fetterolf's is standing room only. Though if you are waiting, you can help yourself, often with Donna's numerous invitations, to the selection of about a dozen different varieties of pastries and baked. And, of course, the treats are seasonal. Don't be surprised if you are invited to try a Christmas tree shaped sugar cookie if you during the month of December. Though it truly is tempting to stay by the treats the entire time, you will eventually make your way past the waiting area and into the heart of the shop, the place where you cleaned up and looking pretty, the barber chairs. There are four barber chairs, and they are much like the chairs you would picture your grandfather getting his hair cut in when he was a young buck. They are tall and made of a thick polished metal, wrapped in well-worn green leather. Large leather sharpening straps hang from the right side armrests of every chair. The walls are covered; floor to ceiling, with wood paneling that is very reminiscent of the type that lines basements with shag carpeting. The walls, both in front of and behind the barber chairs, have large mirrors spanning the length of all the barber stations. Most barbershops don't have mirrors in the front and back, but Donna insists on having two mirrors saying that they are essential for deliver customers the

best haircut. Since the start of her career when she first began cutting hair in her father George Weaver's barbershop, just one year after graduating high school, she has utilized two mirrors. Above the long mirror across from the barber stations hangs many pieces of Penn State memorabilia and artwork. Fittingly, everything is Penn State related. Though most of the space is dominated by wrestling memorabilia, a Joe Paterno drawing has remained on the wall since before the Sandusky scandal and Donna has no plans to remove it going forward. Donna has cut many of the Paternos' hair including Joe. She seems to leave it up almost to dare a customer to question her display of such a controversial figure who has even been ridiculed and derided by many life loyal Penn State fans. Her love for Joe certainly doesn't compare to her love of wrestling. She always hangs the most recent Penn State wrestling season schedule poster in the prominent locations in the shop typically near the register. Though posters are always signed by nearly the entire team, but the signatures don't come all at once because Donna gets the wrestlers to sign the poster as they each come into her shop for haircuts. Though a large majority of the team comes down to Fetterolf's, some cut their own hair or go to other barbershops. Donna doesn't worry too much about those who don't sign the poster. According to her, "If they don't come to get a cut here, screw 'em, they don't deserve to have their autograph on my poster."